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Item 8 of the provisional agenda

Outcomes of the 2018 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development

Summary

The secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) hereby presents the report of the 2018 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development to the thirtieth ESCWA session, as adopted by the Forum at its fifth session held in Beirut from 24 to 26 April 2018 on the theme "Natural resources, future generations and the common good". The Arab Forum constitutes a high-level regional platform to review and follow up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region. Its report contains key messages that will be presented at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, to be held in New York from 9 to 18 July 2018 on the theme "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies".

ESCWA organized the 2018 Arab Forum in collaboration with the League of Arab States and United Nations organizations operating in the Arab region. Its work programme included general sessions on the main theme, the means of implementation at the regional level, and national experiences in implementing the 2030 Agenda; and specialized sessions focusing on priority issues for the Arab region, such as the exchange of lessons learned from voluntary national reviews, the role of civil society in implementing the 2030 Agenda, water and its links to sustainable development, mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment in national plans to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, youth issues and young people's role in the transformation towards sustainable Arab societies, the environment and its role in achieving integration by incorporating environment issues in development planning, the principle of 'leaving no one behind' within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, the role of cities and local governments in achieving sustainable development, and sustainable energy and its role in building sustainable and resilient societies.

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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Report

2018 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development

"Natural resources, future generations and the common good"

United Nations House, Beirut, 24-26 April 2018

United Nations
Beirut, 2018

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), under the patronage of the Lebanese Prime Minister, Mr. Saad Hariri, and in collaboration with the League of Arab States and other United Nations organizations operating in the Arab region, organized the 2018 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD) on the theme "Natural resources, future generations and the common good", which was held in Beirut from 24 to 26 April 2018. Lebanon chaired the Forum, which was opened by Mr. Ghattas Khoury, the Lebanese Minister of Culture, representing the Prime Minister.

2. The AFSD is a high-level regional platform for reviewing and following up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region. The Doha Declaration on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, emanating from the twenty-ninth ESCWA session (Doha, 13-15 December 2016), enshrines the Forum as an annual meeting of Arab Governments and sustainable development stakeholders to consider national and regional experiences and the implementation mechanisms of the 2030 Agenda at the national and regional levels.[1] The outcomes of the Arab Forum are submitted to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

3. The 2018 Arab Forum was preceded by six regional preparatory meetings, namely: the Arab High-level Forum on the World Summit on the Information Society and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Beirut, 8-12 May 2017); the Regional Seminar for Parliamentarians on the 2030 Agenda (Beirut, 8-9 November 2017); the Arab Preparatory Meeting on Energy-related Issued for the 2018 AFSD and the HLPF (Beirut, 27-28 March 2018); the Arab Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues for the 2018 AFSD and the HLPF (Beirut, 28-29 March 2018); the Arab Preparatory Meeting on Environmental and Natural Resources Issues for the 2018 AFSD and the HLPF (Cairo, 11-12 April 2018); and the Regional Meeting of Civil Society on Sustainable Development in the Arab Region (Beirut, 22-23 April 2018) (see annex to the present report).

4. The 2018 Arab Forum coincided with the third year of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. More Arab countries have begun adapting their national plans and strategies to the 2030 Agenda, establishing the necessary institutional structures to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the national level, and designing follow-up and review mechanisms at the national and regional levels.

5. The Forum's work programme included plenary sessions on the main theme "Natural resources, future generations and the common good", the means of implementation at the regional level and national experiences in implementing the 2030 Agenda; and special sessions focusing on priority issues for the Arab region.

6. Participants in the 2018 AFSD agreed on several key messages for submission to the HLPF, which will be held in New York from 9 to 18 July 2018 on the theme "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies". The outcomes of the Arab Forum will also be presented at the thirtieth ESCWA session and at the fifth meeting of the ESCWA Executive Committee.

I. KEY MESSAGES FROM THE 2018 AFSD

A. General messages

1. Confirm the Arab region's development priorities as presented in the outcomes of previous Arab Forum sessions since 2014.

[1] The Forum derives its terms of reference from a series of ESCWA resolutions, including resolution 327 (XXIX) on the working mechanisms of the AFSD adopted at the twenty-ninth ESCWA session (Doha, 13-15 December 2016), resolution 314 (XXVIII) on the AFSD adopted at the twenty-eighth ESCWA session (Tunis, 15-18 September 2014), and Executive Committee resolution 322 on a strategy and plan of action on the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development adopted by the Committee at its second meeting (Amman, 14-16 December 2015).

2. Affirm the key messages emanating for the 2017 Arab Forum submitted to the 2017 High-level Political Forum, and the need to implement the practical recommendations therein[2] and to renew commitments to the objectives of regional general and sectoral forums on the 2030 Agenda and to the recommendations made at the Arab Forum's regional preparatory meetings.

3. Stress the effectiveness of regional participatory work between United Nations organizations operating in the Arab region, the League of Arab States and all governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, such as the private sector, banks, funds, civil society organizations, academia, research centres and media organizations, so as to unify the Arab region's positions on implementing and following up on the 2030 Agenda.

4. Affirm the principle of real participation, integration and coordination between institutions and all stakeholders at the national and regional levels by adopting mechanisms and frameworks that strengthen stakeholder participation in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

5. Call for establishing the foundations of democracy and for effective political participation from political parties, parliaments, civil society, the private sector, academia and the media, given that governance built on the principles of human rights, participation, transparency, integrity and accountability enhances national ownership and people's involvement in the development process.

6. Monitor the current situation in the Arab region and its repercussions for human beings and the natural environment in development planning, while taking into account social, environmental, economic, cultural and political changes and with reference to data, policies and mechanisms.

7. Reduce social, economic and cultural disparities in handling natural and environmental resources to enable all social groups to tackle natural phenomena, such as climate change, desertification and floods; and uphold people's right to access information and justice, have their voice and concerns heard by decision-makers, and impact the equitable management, use and distribution of natural resources.

8. Stress the important role of civil society in calling for social justice and the protection of human rights as pivotal goals and fundamental principles for exacting transformative change in the Arab region's sustainable development approach.

9. Confirm the critical importance of investing in young people as a significant demographic dividend, and a key pillar for achieving the SDGs. This requires their empowerment and participation in all economic, social, environmental, cultural and political dimensions, as principal contributors to raising human capital, keeping pace with global developments and building a diverse economy based on science, knowledge and innovation.

10. Underscore the importance of the relationship between the scientific community and decision-makers and of strengthening communication between them; support scientific research and competitiveness and humanities and social sciences that assist in linking the various dimensions of development, and in formulating development policies and approaches and monitoring their impact on people, societies and common cultural heritage; and call for the establishment of a committee comprising Arab scientists from various professional backgrounds to provide guidance to decision-makers.

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[2] https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/arab-forum-sustainable-development-2017-final-report-en.pdf.

11. Work on formulating curriculums in line with current developments to raise citizens who are active in their societies, and enable them to fully achieve their aspirations and become the driving force towards transformative change; and review the cultural dimension of sustainable development and enshrine development as a human right and as a process for ensuring sustainability and a decent life for current and future generations.

B. Implementing and following up on the 2030 Agenda: Arab countries' perspective

2030 Agenda from Arab countries' perspective

12. Formulate development plans based on clear and comprehensive visions that take into account interlinkages between issues, and follow a phased application process in the short, medium and long terms to ensure that those plans are flexible and updateable in the light of periodic evaluations and national and regional developments.

13. Work on raising awareness and standardizing concepts and discourse through cooperation and coordination within Government and between its institutions to ensure that the 2030 Agenda is seen as an integrated development programme; and build upon and restructure existing institutional frameworks and mechanisms, if required, and strengthen the capacity of their cadres rather than developing parallel systems that might restrict institutional coordination and cooperation efforts.

14. Build institutional capacity and increase communication between Government, financial institutions and the public and private sectors and forge fruitful partnerships between them; enhance transparency, accountability, oversight, data collection systems, information exchange and support for the role of scientific and research institutions; promote dialogue and cooperation between sectors; and strengthen local governance.

15. Identify institutional frameworks that regulate between governmental and non-governmental bodies to guarantee periodic cooperation and partnership on sustainable development issues.

16. Confirm the importance of public budgets as a tool for translating national plans and strategies into implementable and sustainable development projects, while stressing the need to follow a real participatory approach, especially by involving parliament in developing, implementing and monitoring government budgets.

17. Strengthen Arab parliaments' oversight role by raising awareness of development plans and programmes, and by developing tools to monitor government work through checks and balances, inquiries and parliamentary committees.

18. Affirm that data gaps, weak statistics systems and data analysis are major challenges facing Arab countries in identifying national priorities, goals and targets in line with their situations and aspirations.

19. Focus on the regional dimension of sustainable development and the need to strengthen coordination, cooperation, integration and solidarity between Arab countries, given that development issues such as environmental challenges, water resources, energy and migration, including brain drain, are joint issues that require real regional partnerships that effectively contribute to supporting the Arab least developed countries and conflict-affected countries.

20. Intensify regional efforts to promote peace and the rebuilding of war-damaged countries and areas, and support humanitarian and development initiatives in countries facing severe crises resulting from displacement, by adopting interim solutions and policies covering social, environmental, political and economic issues.

21. Stress the importance of investing in local development work through a participatory approach that contributes to preserving the social fabric and promoting reconciliation.

Follow-up and review at the national level, including voluntary national reviews

22. Recognize that voluntary national reviews are not only a mechanism to follow up on national development efforts, and that they entail more than the preparation of national reports. They are a catalyst for long-term participatory work, a tool to reformulate partners' roles and to identify their cooperation mechanisms, and an opportunity to consider achievements, identify gaps, assess weaknesses and ensure that the development process is on the right track.

23. Acknowledge that developing an approach covering all government sectors requires tackling disparities in understanding sustainable development plans and in interactions between different sectors and government bodies to prepare for drafting voluntary national reviews, while taking into account the importance of raising awareness, standardizing the development discourse, and avoiding multiple coordinators of the review process at the national level.

24. Underscore the need for Governments to involve all stakeholders, including local governments, civil society, the private sector, parliament and houses of expertise, in all preparatory stages of voluntary national reviews, namely in the planning process and in collecting information to draft the reviews, and not only in revising the final drafts.

25. Consider a mechanism for selecting civil society organizations to participate in the voluntary national review process and in preparing a report for submission at the High-level Political Forum to ensure the adoption of a participatory approach that also preserves those organizations' independence.

26. Confirm the importance of mainstreaming gender equality in the development and evaluation of national and regional sustainable development programmes, and in preparing voluntary national reviews for submission at the High-level Political Forum.

27. Strengthen the role of data producers and develop statistical approaches in line with global indicators, and formulate and adopt methodologies to evaluate policy effectiveness that complement the analytical process.

28. Affirm the role of volunteers in preparing national reviews, especially regarding information provision and collection since they are the most familiar with the situation on the ground in various sectors.

29. Confirm the role of the AFSD as a platform for exchanging experiences and lessons, and for benefiting from knowledge accumulated since 2016 from voluntary national reviews, the guidelines issued by the Secretary-General and the handbook on preparing voluntary national reviews, among other tools.

C. Natural resources, the Sustainable Development Goals and future generations from an Arab perspective

30. Focus on priorities and challenges facing natural resources, especially increasing demand for them because of climate change, water shortages, desertification, flooding, population growth, voluntary and forced displacement and difficult security situations caused by war and occupation, which all impact food, water and energy security, while taking into account the need to conserve them for future generations.

31. Affirm the principles of equality and justice in the use, management and distribution of natural resources, especially regarding women since they are mostly responsible for managing water and energy at the household level; focus on the environmental damage caused by the degradation of natural resources and their misuse; and encourage joint action to reduce inequality in natural resource distribution at the national level.

32. Underscore the role of cultural change in moving towards inclusive government policies and sustainable individual practices, including stopping waste, rationalizing natural resources, enhancing a sense of ownership towards natural resources and supporting vocational training, especially in fields related to water, energy, agriculture and the environment, to alter consumption and management patterns and to preserve resources as a shared responsibility that concerns not only Governments but all social groups and individuals.

33. Stress the importance of identifying effective mechanisms to support and facilitate dialogue and coordination between Arab countries on natural resource management, especially shared resources, to promote projects and initiatives on Arab integration, to meet the needs of refugees, displaced populations and host communities when possible, and to cooperate in preparing reconstruction efforts based on sustainable energy systems.

34. Promote the role of young people as development actors and involve them in formulating policies and in follow-up, monitoring and accountability processes on sustainable development issues; and recognize their role in reconstruction and environmental conservation efforts as a key factor for peace and social cohesion with regard to shared natural resources and the common good.

35. Confirm that the sustainable management of natural resources entails upholding populations' right to control their resources, notably the State of Palestine does not enjoy that right because of the Israeli occupation that also diminishes the sovereignty of neighbouring Arab countries over their land and natural resources, especially water; and request the United Nations to launch negotiations and discussions on international instruments regarding water resources, the sovereignty of Arab States over their resources, the resolution of conflicts over shared water resources, and urging the international community to uphold its responsibilities in that regard.

36. Establish an Arab higher authority on water, energy and food, and support it through technical methods that enable it to consider interrelated issues that strengthen food, water and energy security; and propose recommendations and practical solutions to decision-makers and regional and national strategy developers.

Water

37. Strive to achieve water security in the Arab region at the level of households and local communities, at the subnational, national and regional levels and between countries, to guarantee the provision of and access to sufficient clean water and sanitation services for all.

38. Confirm that understanding the humanitarian dimension of water security assists in ensuring that no one is left behind in development plans, and limits disparities in providing water services that are exacerbated by conflict, crisis, occupation and poverty, in addition to climate change and reliance on transboundary water resources.

39. Guide and operationalize efforts aimed at overcoming water shortages in the Arab region, with reference to the SDGs, indicators, targets and sex disaggregated data, including SDG 6.4 indicators that measure changes in the number of people facing water scarcity.

40. Highlight the interlinkages between SDGs related to water as a principal resource for achieving food security, ensuring health, supporting sustainable cities and ecosystems, preserving energy resources, and achieving peace.

41. Advocate for people's right to water and sanitation services, and call for legal frameworks guaranteeing water rights.

42. Affirm the role of scientific research and domestic innovation in supporting efforts to achieve the water-related SDGs, including innovative technologies that promote the development of non-traditional water resources in the Arab region.

43. Stress the importance of participation and partnerships and international funding, in addition to capacity-building and preparing for natural disasters such as drought and floods, as key factors for achieving water security in the Arab region.

Sustainable energy

44. Underscore the need for Arab economies to move towards sustainable energy, while taking into account disparities in country priorities resulting from the conditions they face, given that business-as-usual in the fields of energy and natural resource management in the Arab region is not sustainable.

45. Highlight the need to consider renewable energy from a regional perspective, rather than from that of individual countries, to achieve an optimal share of renewable energy in the energy mix.

46. Stress the need to strengthen cooperation and trade between Arab countries, advance domestic manufacturing of the elements of clean energy technologies, network between Arab countries, and promote Arab integration projects and initiatives, such as an Arab common electricity market, while focusing on smart grids and green corridors.

47. Advocate the development of integrated and proactive policies and regulatory and legislative frameworks to enable the rapid implementation of measures for efficient energy use and the dissemination of renewable energy to assist the Arab region in moving towards more sustainable use of its natural resources.

48. Attract financial support from donor countries and institutions and international funding to finance joint national and regional programmes and projects to move towards more sustainable energy systems, and forge fruitful partnerships that are compatible with national goals and domestic funding mechanisms.

49. Highlight the need to intensify capacity-building programmes for cadres working in the field of renewable energy and energy efficiency, especially regarding the preparation of feasibility studies and the provision of suitable financing.

50. Confirm the need to follow a rights-based approach in the development process, and to mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment in energy projects and encourage women to become entrepreneurs, so as to reduce poverty and improve health and the environment.

Environment

51. Stress the importance of mitigating the negative effects of economic growth on the environment by evaluating the environmental impact of development projects, including through strategic environmental evaluation of economic and development planning that Governments and financial institutions undertake; and incorporate issues of biodiversity and natural resources into development planning given their key role in sustainable development.

52. Underscore the need to preserve biodiversity and follow an integrated approach to natural resource management, given that natural resource depletion both leads to and results from conflict and displacement, which requires identifying mechanisms that prevent land degradation and desertification so as to reduce pressure on populations and services and preserve peace.

53. Focus on rapid and unregulated urbanization under the framework of international treaties for the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity. Urbanization causes environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, and affects people's health and wellbeing and economic and environmental growth.

54. Since environmental and natural resource issues are transboundary, focus on a participatory approach to implementing the SDGs, benefit from lessons learned and experiences, and strengthen data availability and collection for monitoring and evaluation purposes, especially regarding SGDs that are directly and indirectly related to the environment and natural resources.

55. Stress the importance of investing in disaster risk reduction and in post-disaster reconstruction to build resilience to disasters and adapt to their future impact.

56. Confirm the importance of establishing and institutionalizing national high committees on disaster risk reduction, comprising all national stakeholders including governmental organizations, regional and national non-governmental institutions, civil society organizations covering all specializations, and scientific research centres.

57. Develop national strategies and action plans on disaster risk reduction, and coordinate data collection from all bodies represented in committees to report progress in achieving the global targets of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction through an electronic monitoring system whose indicators are linked to the SDG indicators.

58. Underscore the importance of establishing national databases on disaster losses that occurred over the 10 years before the adoption of the Sendai Framework (2005-2015) so as to facilitate analyses of disaster risk patterns and trends, identify priorities in disaster risk evaluation, and develop the necessary strategies and plans to limit disasters, adapt to and mitigate their future impact and undertake reconstruction so as to build resilience against future disasters.

D. Priority issues at the regional level

Economic diversification

59. Confirm the importance of adopting a sustainable development approach built on economic diversification, addressing consumption patterns and strengthening sustainable production in view of the challenges facing Arab countries, including economic pressures, demographic changes including from migration and displacement, and the depletion of natural resource such as oil, water and agricultural land.

60. Highlight the importance of developing new sustainable development approaches through economic policy reform, formulating policies to grow the digital economy and promote innovation, strengthening the private sector (especially small and medium enterprises), attracting investment, and ensuring environmental security and social justice.

61. Stress the importance of involving a broad group of stakeholders in formulating sustainable policies on economic diversification, including local governments, the private sector and civil society.

62. Underscore the need for the Arab region to benefit from the continuing industrial revolution by investing in science and technology and strengthening regional cooperation and integration to build capacity and mobilize efforts and resources.

63. Agree on the need to reform education systems as a necessary prerequisite to achieving economic diversification given their strong links to innovation and manufacturing, and to fully benefiting from the digital economy.

64. Stimulate innovation for development by establishing an integrated national innovation system, developing specific initiatives and new approaches in all economic sectors to support small and medium enterprises and incorporate them into the formal economy, and transforming the informal economy (which is widespread in the Arab region) into a formal economy.

65. Highlight the importance of active participation in the Fourth Industrial Revolution and new jobs, expedite the adaptation and modernization of education systems and outputs, promote science and technology and harness them to ensure creativity and entrepreneurship, and stress the need to involve the private sector in those efforts.

Planning for resilient, inclusive and sustainable cities

66. Stress that good city planning benefits everyone equally, including migrants, refugees, the displaced and other vulnerable social groups. It requires mechanisms that guarantee the public's participation in general discussions and a review of laws and legislation that discriminate against certain social groups.

67. Highlight the need to devise solutions and policies to tackle the issue of city land being transformed from a common good to a commodity, and to move from economies based on real estate speculation that exclude large segments of society towards social solidarity economies that meet the needs of all social groups.

68. Underscore the need to make cities healthier by adopting an integrated approach that includes all sectors and stakeholders to develop ideas, identify priorities and monitor progress, starting from the strong links between human health, the various sustainable development dimensions, ownership and social responsibility.

69. Stress the importance of reconstructing war-damaged cities in a sustainable manner; take into account the needs of displaced populations, minorities and marginalized groups; focus on providing education, health and other basic services that contribute to social cohesion; and make sustainable use of archaeological and environmental wealth to stimulate the economy and tourism.

70. Urge decision-makers to devise solutions and adopt new techniques to measure economic, social and environmental changes at the city level such as the Urban Poverty Index that measures poverty in cities, adopt appropriate solutions for the domestic context, and benefit from successful experiences in reducing inequality and achieving balanced, sustainable and inclusive development for all.

Financing inclusive and sustainable development

71. Confirm that securing financing for sustainable development depends on the advancement of the economic system to build national capacity and ensure the fair distribution of wealth, to strengthen the private sector and reform the tax system, to promote economic sovereignty and the shift towards a productive economy rather than a consumer economy, and to develop effective partnerships between different actors, including Governments, banks and financial institutions, the private sector, civil society and the international community.

72. Emphasize the importance of economic diversification and of engaging with the private sector, and support and forge international and regional partnerships to secure funding, particularly for Arab countries facing difficulty in securing the required funding for sustainable development because of decreasing international development assistance and its focus on security and humanitarian aid, economic fluctuations, high public debt, and weak foreign trade that is governed by unfair rules.

73. Stress the importance of facilitating migrant remittance transfer and encourage their investment in development projects in countries of origin.

74. Underscore the need to develop public budgets, employ international standards in their preparation, enhance their transparency, and promote participation in their development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to reduce corruption and waste, in addition to establishing a legal framework to limit tax evasion and facilitate access to information.

75. Stress the necessity of promoting the private sector's role in achieving sustainable development by creating an enabling environment for investment through legislation and institutional reform; and confirm the need to adopt human rights standards governing the private sector with regard to transparency and responsibility to guide its involvement in the development process.

76. Highlight banks' role in enhancing investor confidence, including through initiatives to encourage banks that finance development projects, providing the necessary data and expertise to enable banks to assess the profitability of development projects, financial literacy, and shifting private sector involvement in the development process from corporate social responsibility to profitability so as to encourage investment.

77. Agree on the importance of adopting an integrated system to combat corruption so as to reform the financial and economic systems, and develop regulations and banking laws to recover stolen assets and invest them in development plans and projects.

78. Emphasize the need to bridge the knowledge gap, through studies on international and Arab experiences in corporate social responsibility and their development impact, in securing financing to achieve development, and in producing data on key indicators.

79. Stress the importance of enhancing cooperation and coordination with funding sources, especially those in the Arab region, particularly sovereign funds, Islamic finance and *zakat* funds, and their role in supporting sustainable development.

Civil society's role in sustainable development

80. Highlight that civil society organizations participating in the 2018 AFSD adopted the outputs and recommendations of the Regional Meeting of Civil Society on Sustainable Development in the Arab Region, held in Beirut on 22 and 23 April 2018.

81. Agree on establishing a platform for civil society organizations operating in the Arab region, as a regional mechanism that strengthens civil society organizations' role in sustainable development, in following up on the implementation of national plans, including the 2030 Agenda, at the national and regional levels, and in scrutinizing Governments.

82. Emphasize the importance of good governance, transparency and self-monitoring in government and non-government sectors, including civil society organizations and the private sector.

83. Stress the need to enhance the operating environment of civil society organizations, and build their capacity to effectively participate in sustainable development and decision-making processes.

Women's empowerment and mainstreaming gender equality to preserve natural resources and achieve the common good

84. Underscore the need to take into account gender issues in all legislative frameworks and laws, and strengthen accountability to achieve gender equality at all government levels to implement the 2030 Agenda.

85. Focus on the importance of disseminating the concept of gender equality in national development plans and the SDGs, and involve women in decision-making and policy formulation regarding water, energy, cities, production, consumption, regional ecosystems and means of implementation, given their role in water and energy management at the household level, to ensure that women and girls are not excluded from the development process because of vulnerability, and to invest their abilities in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

86. Stress the need to effectively involve women in urban planning to enable them to express their concerns and needs, and to take women into consideration when formulating plans so as to strengthen their social and economic participation.

87. Improve the availability and quality of sex-disaggregated data given the region's need for better analytical approaches that contribute to developing gender-sensitive policies and mainstreaming them into efforts to empower women and achieve gender equality.

Young people's role in moving towards sustainable Arab societies

88. Welcome and commend intensive youth participation in the 2018 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, pursuant to recommendations made at previous forums, as a positive step towards their participation as a key component in achieving the SDGs.

89. Confirm that unemployment, education and the absence of social justice are priorities and a source of concern for young people in the Arab region; and call for the fundamental reform of countries' economic structures to provide decent employment opportunities for young people today and in the future in view of demographic changes and the increased share of young people in Arab societies.

90. Agree on the need to formulate and commit to an integrated human rights and policy framework in tackling all youth issues, which upholds and protects basic freedoms and human rights without overlooking vulnerable or marginalized groups and guarantees equal opportunities for all; and intensify efforts to reach young people in rural areas as they are key to achieving positive change, peace and stability.

91. Affirm the family's role in developing a culture of democracy among young people, often excluded from decision-making processes, despite the importance of their issues in the 2030 Agenda, because of a lack of participatory policies and frameworks, on the one hand, and the reluctance of young people to participate in the political process, on the other. Rapid action is therefore required to build and enhance trust between young people and the State, based on citizenship, freedom and participation.

92. Emphasize the media's role as an advocate for youth issues, thus entailing increased interaction with the media to ensure that it adopts youth issues and to stimulate its role in that regard; and invite the media to publish youth initiatives and innovation in implementing the SDGs.

93. Encourage Arab parliaments to allocate budget resources to youth development and to building their skills to face challenges and devise innovative solutions to them.

94. Agree that Security Council resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security with its five pillars, especially the protection pillar, represents a basic and appropriate framework for young people in the Arab region; and urge countries to raise awareness of the resolution at all levels, open local and national channels of dialogue with young people, and involve them in conceptualizing its implementation.

95. Identify clear steps towards establishing a regional network that influences the formulation and implementation of national and regional policies on young people, including forming an Arab youth delegation to participate in United Nations official events on the 2030 Agenda, providing platforms to discuss and support youth-led organizations, and promote partnerships, networking, communication and skills-building.

The principle of 'leaving no one behind' in the Arab region

96. Confirm that the principle of 'leaving no one behind' is a key pillar of the 2030 Agenda that cannot be implemented without inclusive public policies guaranteed by international law and human rights standards.

97. Affirm that the principle of 'leaving no one behind' is a major challenge facing Arab countries, especially regarding vulnerable groups and people living in rural and remote areas; and devise solutions to raise awareness at the local level and involve governorates and local authorities and communities in identifying priorities, planning, implementing and following up to ensure that everyone benefits from development returns.

98. Recognize that ensuring that no one is left behind requires the adoption of two parallel approaches: the first should focus on tackling structural factors and dynamics that result in poverty and marginalization through inclusive public policies, and the second involves measures and targeted policies to widen the social safety net to tackle current social challenges.

99. Acknowledge that implementing the 'leaving no one behind' principle requires ending discrimination in laws and practices, disseminating a culture of tolerance and solidarity, following human rights-based approaches, and committing to the common good.

100. Stress the importance of applying the 'leaving no on behind' principle by mainstreaming the rights and issues of young people, women, persons with disabilities, older persons and other vulnerable groups, by enabling them and involving them in planning, implementation and monitoring processes, and by preparing follow-up reports.

101. Emphasize the need to adopt new/advanced approaches in humanities and social sciences to identify disparate social groups and monitor the status of those that are not covered in national statistics.

102. Confirm the importance of measurement as a key component of development: measuring progress and identifying gaps is achieved by monitoring the situation of the most marginalized social groups, which requires avoiding national average indicators and developing indicators that measure the impact of national or local policies and programmes on the poorest and most vulnerable social groups.

103. Invite capital to invest in remote rural areas, where services, employment and education are at their lowest levels; and provide financial services, markets and training tools and manage risks for small farmers, in line with the 'leaving no one behind' principle.

Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals

104. Welcome the participation of local authority representatives at the AFSD as a step towards active interconnectedness between the local, national, regional and global levels; and raise awareness about the importance of local development in implementing the 'leaving no one behind' principle.

105. Confirm the necessity of adapting the SDGs to national contexts in the Arab region and of local authorities and municipalities adopting the 2030 Agenda and its principles as a general framework to identify priorities, goals and targets, while taking into account national strategies and programmes, on the one hand, and geographic, demographic and social characteristics, on the other; and affirm the role of cities and local communities in the regional follow-up and review process and in scrutinizing the Government and evaluating its work.

106. Recognize that achieving the SDGs requires establishing appropriate institutional implementation and follow-up mechanisms and strengthening existing partnerships with civil society and development actors by forging partnerships and networking with municipalities and by promoting further decentralization to enable local authorities to efficiently fulfil their functions, in coordination with national Governments.

107. Affirm the importance of mobilizing financial, human and administrative resources to ensure the independence of local decision-makers, which requires a review of laws that regulate budgeting and govern donors and central authorities' relationships with local authorities.

E. Supporting regional efforts to prepare for the 2019 Arab Forum

108. Stress the need to translate some messages into practical steps through regional activities implemented in the period until the 2019 Arab Forum. Those activities could include the following:

- Organize an expert group meeting comprising all partners involved in the follow-up and review process.
- Organize a meeting on follow-up mechanisms and voluntary national reviews.
- Broaden the base of consultation and dialogue between non-governmental partners, especially civil society organizations and the private sector.
- Organize an annual regional meeting for parliamentarians to strengthen national parliaments' role in implementing the 2030 Agenda and in the follow-up and review process.
- Promote knowledge production and build capacity by developing training material in Arabic on aligning the 2030 Agenda with national and regional specificities.
- Form a team of experts and trainers specialized in the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.
- Promote partnerships and organize joint activities between all actors in the field of sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda, including United Nations organizations operating in the Arab region and the League of Arab States.
- Prepare a report on progress in implementing the work programme, to be presented at the 2019 AFSD.

II. SESSIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

7. In addition to an opening and closing session, the 2018 Arab Forum consisted of seven plenary sessions on the main theme "Natural resources, future generations and the common good".

8. The 2018 Arab Forum also included nine special sessions on priority issues for the Arab region.

A. Opening session

9. Speakers at the opening session included Mr. Mohamed Ali Alhakim, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA; Ms. Nada Al Agizy, Director of the Sustainable Development and International Cooperation Division of the League of Arab States, who spoke on behalf of the Secretary-General; Mr. Luay Shabaneh, Regional Director of the Arab States Regional Office of the United Nations Population Fund; Mr. Aziz Rabbah, Minister of Energy, Mines, and Sustainable Development of Morocco; and Mr. Ghattas Khoury, Lebanese Minister of Culture and representative of the Arab Forum's patron. Ms. Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, participated via video recording.

10. Ms. Maisaa Youssef of the ESCWA Sustainable Development Division gave an overview of the status and challenges of sustainable development in the Arab region. She summarized the political, social and environmental instability in the region, and achievements in Arab countries under the 2030 Agenda. She raised several discussion points on sustainable development initiatives launched by Arab countries, and stressed the importance of voluntary national reviews in terms of promoting and benefiting from participation between stakeholders. She presented data on SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12 and 15 from some Arab countries to highlight the lack of data for the required indicators to monitor and evaluate those SDGs.

B. Plenary sessions

Plenary session 1: Implementing the 2030 Agenda: countries' perspectives on integrated development planning and transformative change

11. Ms. Dalal Saoud, Media Expert, moderated the first plenary session, in which participated Mr. Khaled Mahdi, Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development of Kuwait; Mr. Ahmad Kamaly, Advisor to the Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform for Planning and Monitoring of Egypt; Mr. Ahmad bin Hassan Al Hammadi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar; Mr. Mohamed Al-Hawri, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation for Economic Studies Sector of Yemen; and Mr. Refaat Hijazi, Advisor to the Chairperson of the Planning and International Cooperation Commission of the Syrian Arab Republic.

12. Panellists gave an overview of their countries' work in development planning since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. The interventions highlighted the challenges facing the Arab region, especially in aligning national policies and plans with the 2030 Agenda; in monitoring, follow-up and evaluation processes requiring data and information; in development financing and economic diversification; and in making the private sector a fundamental partner in the development process.

13. Participants also underscored the challenges faced by conflict-affected countries, which limited their ability to achieve progress or growth.

Plenary session 2: Voluntary national reviews and the day after: follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda at the national level

14. Mr. Rami Ahmad, representative of the Islamic Development Bank Group, moderated the second plenary session, in which participated Ms. Haifa Al Mogrin, Assistant Deputy Minister for Sustainable Development Affairs at the Ministry of Economy and Planning of Saudi Arabia; Mr. Mahmoud Ataya, General Director of the Policy and Reform Unit at the Office of the Prime Minister of the State of Palestine; Mr. Hassan Musa Yousif, Advisor at the National Population Council of the Sudan; Mr. Ziad Obeidat, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation of Jordan; Mr. Nawfal Naciri, Member of the House of Representatives of Morocco; and Mr. Kassem El Saddik, Vice Chair of EvalSDGs in Canada.

15. Representatives presented countries' experiences in preparing voluntary national reviews. Panellists also discussed national data shortages; the importance of strengthening internal capacity and building upon cumulative experiences; the role of different actors, including parliaments, in the follow-up, monitoring and evaluation process of voluntary national reviews; and the importance of disseminating the 'leaving no one behind' principle and of reviewing policy effectiveness.

16. Mr. Kassem El Saddik gave a presentation on voluntary national reviews from a scientific perspective. Following consideration of 65 national reviews from countries across the world, it became clear that the reports often relied on incomplete indicators, failed to assess realities on the ground, and did not reflect consistency between policies and national plans. Moreover, although most national reviews discussed the institutional frameworks employed, they did not highlight the principle of gender equality or accurately present preparations for the preparatory phase preceding the drafting of national reviews.

Plenary session 3: Integrating natural resources in development planning for a resilient and sustainable future

17. Ms. Roula Majdalani, Director of the ESCWA Sustainable Development Policies Division, moderated the third plenary session, in which participated Mr. Aziz Rabbah, Ministry of Energy, Mines and Sustainable Development of Morocco; Mr. Fadi Comair, Director-General for Energy and Water at the Ministry of Energy and Water of Lebanon; Mr. Hussein Abaza, Head of the Sustainable Development Unit (Egypt 2030 Vision) at the Ministry of Planning, Follow-up and Administrative Reform of Egypt; Ms. Seteney Shami, Director-General of the Arab Council for the Social Sciences in Beirut; and Mr. Jasim Ali, Executive Manager of the Board of Directors of the Peace Generations Network in Baghdad.

18. Panellists discussed the major challenges facing Arab countries with regard to their natural resources, such as water scarcity, natural resource wastage, land depletion, and the impact of climate change, conflict and displacement. They stressed the need to move towards sustainable energy systems by improving resource management, reducing dependence on fossil fuels, employing modern irrigation systems and developing water and energy networks, and raising awareness about effective natural resource management, environmental conservation and consumption rationalization. They also highlighted the importance of countries sharing data and research outcomes, of culture and education to sustainable development, and of incorporating the principle of resource rationalization in school and university curriculums. They focused on peoples' right to sovereignty over their natural resources, and on positive competition between countries to develop their natural resources and benefit from successful experiences; and the need to include the environmental dimension in laws and strategies before their enactment, to establish regulatory bodies to follow up on them, and to empower civil society to evaluate the implementation of development policies.

Plenary session 4: Rethinking economic diversification: safeguarding the lives and livelihoods of future generations

19. Mr. Ghassan Dibeh, Chair of the Economics Department at the Lebanese American University, moderated the fourth plenary session, in which participated Mr. Hassan Janabi, Minister of Water Resources of Iraq; Mr. Muhammad Saidam, Advisor for Research and Science at the Royal Scientific Society of Jordan; Mr. Rami Shamma, Programme Manager at the Development for People and Nature Association in Lebanon; and Mr. Souhail Marine, Regional Expert on Technology for Development.

20. Interventions covered economic diversification and the need to move from consumer economies to productive economies. Panellists discussed the importance of analysing the feasibility of supporting productive sectors and of benefiting from developed countries' experiences in that regard. They indicated other challenges impeding economic development, such as war, conflict, unregulated urbanization, and increased internal and cross-border displacement. They stressed the need to focus on innovation and the digital economy, especially in a globalized economic environment built on global value chains based on components manufactured in various countries, thus providing an opportunity for developing countries to join value chains by diversifying their economies. They also called for measures to encourage the development of the digital economy, and for new approaches to ICT strategies linked to national development plans.

Plenary session 5: Planning for resilient, inclusive and sustainable cities

21. The following panellists participated in the fifth plenary session: Ms. Huda Alsiyabi, Director of the Community-based Initiatives Department at the Ministry of Health of Oman; Mr. Adib Nehmeh, Expert in Poverty and Human Sustainable Development; Ms. Mona Fawaz, Assistant Professor of Architecture and Design at the American University of Beirut; and Mr. Suhaib Yahya Kasim Al-Darzi, Lecturer in the Civil Engineering Department at Mosul University. Mr. Omar Abdulaziz Hallaj, Senior Coordinator at the Common Space Initiative, moderated the session.

22. Discussions focused on the links between sustainable development, urban planning, promoting security, political stability, efficiency and public health, strengthening the social integration of marginalized groups,

encouraging coordination between relevant government apparatuses at the local level and coordination between local and national governments, and promoting the common good at the city level.

23. Interventions covered the challenges faced by local governments and councils in rebuilding war-damaged cities and in achieving inclusive and sustainable development planning. Panellists reviewed the experience of Oman in strengthening the local administration of cities and its success in improving the health and living conditions of city inhabitants. They also discussed the need to review legislative and regulatory frameworks of local councils to ensure inhabitant participation in cities' sustainable development processes.

Plenary session 6: Financing inclusive and sustainable development in the Arab region

24. Mr. Ziad Abdel Samad, Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development, moderated the sixth plenary session, in which participated Mr. Anas El Hasnaoui, regional expert on effectiveness development cooperation and civil society actor; Mr. Antoine Hobeich, representative of the Union of Arab Banks; Ms. Kinda Hattar, Regional Advisor for Middle East and North Africa at Transparency International; and Ms. Isabell Kempf, representative of the United Nations Environment Programme.

25. Discussions focused on the challenges of financing sustainable development worldwide. Participants considered the Global Partnership for Development called for by the United Nations to achieve sustainable development. They said that the partnership, which depended on official development assistance from developed countries to developing countries and on foreign direct investment, could not fulfil its mandate because of developed countries' weakened capacity to provide assistance and the increasing debt burdens of developing countries. Consequently, foreign direct investment and the private sector had become a key source of financing, thus strengthening the need for economic diversification. Participants said that given the decline of the real economy, it was necessary to enhance productive capacity in several sectors, such as manufacturing, agriculture and technology, to create employment opportunities for young people and encourage a shift from the informal sector to the formal sector. Participants also emphasized the need to combat corruption by strengthening accountability systems and frameworks, auditing, recovering stolen assets, restructuring tax and trade systems and business environments, and moving towards a green economy.

Plenary session 7: (a) Outcomes of preparatory meetings for the 2018 AFSD and the High-level Political Forum; (b) Key messages from the 2018 AFSD

26. Ms. Khawla Matar, Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCWA, moderated the seventh plenary session. Participants reviewed the outcomes of preparatory meetings for the 2018 AFSD and High-level Political Forum. Mr. Bassel Al Ayoubi, Director-General of the Ministry of Communication of Lebanon presented the outcomes of the Arab Forum on the World Summit on the Information Society and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Mr. Azmi Shuaibi, Member of the Palestenian Legislative Council, presented the outcomes of the Regional Seminar for Parliamentarians in the Arab Region on the 2030 Agenda. Ms. Aurore Feghaly, General-Director of Oil at the Ministry of Energy and Water of Lebanon, presented the outcomes of the Arab Preparatory Meeting on Energy-related Issues for the 2018 AFSD and HLPF. Mr. Hassan Janabi, Minister of Water Resources of Iraq, presented the outcomes of the Arab Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues for the 2018 AFSD and HLPF. Mr. Zaghloul Samhan, Director-General of Policies and Planning at the Ministry of Environmental Affairs of the State of Palestine, presented the outcomes of the Arab Preparatory Meeting on Environmental and Natural Resources Issues for the 2018 AFSD and HLPF. Mr. Ziad Abdel Samad, Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development, presented the outcomes of the Regional Meeting of Civil Society on Sustainable Development in the Arab Region.

27. The 2018 Arab Forum closed with a detailed statement on the key messages, followed by statements from Ms. Karima El Korri, Ms. Mona Fattah and Ms. Sabbidin of the ESCWA Unit on the 2030 Agenda. The detailed statement confirmed participants' consensus on several steps supporting national and regional processes towards achieving national sustainable development plans and the 2030 Agenda.

C. Special sessions

28. During the 2018 Arab Forum, nine special sessions where held covering development dimensions, in line with General Assembly resolution 70/299 on the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level.

1. *Voluntary national reports: sharing lessons learned* (DESA and ESCWA)

29. Ms. Karima El Korri, head of the ESCWA Unit on the 2030 Agenda, facilitated the session, in which participated Mr. Friedrich Soltau, Senior Sustainable Development Officer at the Division for Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs; Ms. Mouchera Karara, Senior Economic Researcher at the Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform of Egypt; Ms. Ola Sidani, economic expert and SDF focal point for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of Lebanon; Ms. Wisal Hussein, Assistant Secretary-General of the National Population Council for Technical Affairs and Sustainable Development of the Sudan; and Ms. Yeran Kejijian of the United Nations Volunteers programme.

30. Interventions covered voluntary national reviews as an accelerator of implementation and a catalyst for the localization of the 2030 Agenda; and a whole-of-government and whole-of-society mechanism to set national targets, review progress and mobilize means of implementation. Discussions focused on voluntary national reviews as an opportunity to assess whether national efforts are on the right path towards development, and an enabler of stakeholder engagement, building strategic partnerships and enhancing national ownership of the 2030 Agenda. Participants stressed the importance of the handbook for preparing voluntary national reviews (2018 edition) in terms of facilitating and guiding the work of relevant national bodies. The representatives of Egypt, Lebanon and the Sudan gave an overview of current work to prepare the voluntary national reviews of each of those countries.

2. *Towards a civil society platform in the Arab region*

31. The following panellists participated in the second special session: Ms. Kinda Hattar, Regional Advisor for Middle East and North Africa at Transparency International; Ms. Atidel Mejebri, Director of the Media Center at the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research; Mr. Mustafa Tlili, Executive Secretary of the Arab Trade Union Confederation; Mr. Emad Adly, General Coordinator of the Arab Network for Environment and Development; and Ms. Sylvana Lakkis, Chair of the Arab Forum for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

32. Participants discussed the outcome document of the Regional Meeting of Civil Society on Sustainable Development in the Arab Region, the topics of the 2018 Arab Forum and the region's other development priorities under the 2030 Agenda. They highlighted women's right to participate in political and public life, and the importance of mainstreaming gender equality in all aspects of development and of combating discrimination and violence against women. They added that the role of persons with disabilities should also be mainstreamed in all sustainable development issues. The discussion recognized the spread of corruption in the region, and the need to include all sectors in fighting corruption and in advocating the separation of powers. Participants focused on civil society's role in implementing the 2030 Agenda, and on the need to establish a platform for CSOs in the Arab region.

3. *Water and the Sustainable Development Goals: an Arab perspective* (League of Arab States and ESCWA)

33. The third special session was facilitated by Ms. Carol Chouchani Cherfane, Chief of the Water Resources Section of the ESCWA Sustainable Development Policies Division; and Mr. Ziad Khayat, First Economic Affairs Officer at the Water Resources Section. The following panellists participated in the session:

Mr. Hssein Elatfy, Former Minister of Water Resources of Egypt and Secretary-General of the Arab Water Council; Mr. Omar Hattab, UNICEF regional adviser; Mr. Pascual Steduto, Director of the Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa of the Food and Agriculture Organization; Mr. Muhammad Saidam, research and scientific adviser at the Royal Scientific Society of Jordan; Ms. Luna Abu Swairah, Director-General of the Centre for Arab Unity Studies; Mr. Mr. Hammou Laamrani, Integrated Expert at the Housing, Environment and Water Department of the Secretariat of the Arab Ministerial Water Council of the League of Arab States; and Mr. Zaher Sulaimani, President of the Omani Water Association.

34. Discussions focused on the key messages and outcomes of the Arab Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues for the 2018 AFSD and HLPF. Participants also discussed the 'human face of water scarcity', based on a working paper prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization. Interventions covered: SDG interlinkages under conditions of water scarcity and climate change; improving shared water resource management; and water-related infrastructure and ensuring access to clean water and sanitation services for all in the regional context. Participants stressed the need to raise awareness about water-related challenges facing Arab countries, and guide efforts to promote a culture of water conservation. They also introduced the International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development (2018-2028).

4. *Mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment in national SDG implementation plans*
(UN Women and ESCWA)

35. The following panellist participated in the fourth special session: Mr. Jean Ogasapian, Minister of State for Women's Affairs of Lebanon; Ms. Shiruk Abayachi, Member of the Iraqi Parliament; Ms. Lina Abirafeh, Director of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World at the Lebanese American University; and Ms. Begona Lasagabaster, Special Representative of the Regional Director of UN Women in Lebanon. Ms. Mehrinaz El Awady, Director of the ESCWA Centre for Women, facilitated the special session.

36. Interventions focused on gender equality and women's empowerment as key elements of the 'leaving no one behind' principle, and on the need for member States to fully and accurately reflect that dimension in their voluntary national reviews. Participants discussed experiences from Iraq and Lebanon, and best practices in the region in the field of mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment in national implementation, follow-up and reporting plans. They stressed the importance of strengthening the contribution of civil society and academic institutions in government measures on achieving gender equality targets under the SDGs. They agreed on several issues, including the need to take into account gender issues in all legislation; the importance of involving women in decision-making and in formulating policies on rationalizing natural resource management and consumption; and improving the provision and quality of sex-disaggregated data.

5. *Youth in the Arab region and the transformation towards sustainable societies*
(Under the auspices of the United Nations Population Fund and ESCWA)

37. The following panellist participated in the fifth special session: Mr. Luay Shabaneh, Regional Director of the Arab States Regional Office of the United Nations Population Fund; Ms. Zeina Saab, Innovator and Entrepreneur at the Nawaya Network; Mr. Nabil Hendy, representative of the Y-Peer International Centre for Youth Development Center in Arab States. Mr. Samir Anouti, Regional Advisor on Youth at the United Nations Population Fund; and Ms. Alya Alaali, Regional Youth Expert and Co-founder of Bayanat Box. Ms. Nancy Ezzeddine, policy researcher and representative of Bayanat Box, gave a presentation on the situation of young people in the Arab region and the difficulties they faced, notably unemployment and forced migration owing to conflict. She discussed entrepreneurship and the establishment of small and medium enterprises based on innovation as mechanisms for creating employment opportunities. She also considered the status of young Arab women who faced challenges in accessing labour markets, and suffered from sexual harassment and inequalities in employment opportunities and remuneration.

38. Panellists confirmed that a major difficulty facing young people in the Arab region was the absence of a clear vision and strategy tackling youth issues and ensuring their involvement in economic, social and political development. Young people were still excluded from decision-making, although youth issues were directly related to SDG implementation.

6. *Environment and natural resources: their role in integration*
(Under the auspices of the League of Arab States and ESCWA)

39. Ms. Melanie Hutchinson, Regional Development Coordinator at the United Nations Environment Programme, facilitated the sixth special session, in which participated Mr. Mr. Hammou Laamrani, Integrated Expert at the Housing, Environment and Water Department of the Secretariat of the Arab Ministerial Water Council of the League of Arab States; Ms. Soha Farouk, Associate Programme Officer at UN Habitat; Mr. Mohamed Atana, Director of Policy and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Environment of Jordan; Mr. Zaghloul Samhan, Director-General of Policies and Planning at the Ministry of Environmental Affairs of the State of Palestine; Ms. Amy Fraenkel, Cooperation and Outreach Support for the Convention on Biological Diversity Head for Mainstreaming at the Netherlands Enterprise Agency; Mr. Limam Abdawa, Sustainable Development Unit of the Poverty-Environment Initiative of Mauritania; and Mr. Hassan Abdirisak Ahmed, Project Officer for the Somalia Climate Resilience Initiative of the United Nations Development Programme.

40. Participants confirmed that sustainable consumption and production were multisectoral empowerment tools to achieve the SDGs, and that unregulated urbanization was both the cause and result of environmental degradation and biodiversity loss. Mechanisms were therefore necessary to halt land degradation and desertification and to preserve biodiversity, as was an integrated approach to effective natural resource management. They focused on strategic environmental evaluation as a key tool for economic and development planning; and on the importance of means of implementation that included the need to strengthen innovative partnerships between sectors, and of increasing financial institutions' role in supporting countries to implement the SDGs through sustainable and green investments.

7. *"Leaving no one behind" in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*
(Under the auspices of UNICEF and ESCWA)

41. Panellists included Ms. Susan Nicolai, Senior Research Fellow in the Growth, Poverty and Inequality Programme of the Overseas Development Institute; Mr. Adib Nehmeh, Expert on Poverty and the 2030 Agenda; and Ms. Tamam Mroue, Executive Director of Mouvement Social.

42. The discussion focused on 'leaving no one behind' as a key principle of the 2030 Agenda, which could only be enshrined through inclusive public policies guaranteed by international law and human rights. Its application required ending discrimination in laws and practices, disseminating a culture of tolerance and solidarity, and employing rights-based approaches that ensured the common good. They stressed the importance of measurement as a key component of development work. They also emphasized the importance of adopting approaches based on humanities and social sciences to identify and monitor disparate social groups not covered by national statistics.

8. *Localizing the SDGs in the Arab region: challenges and prospects for action*
(Under the auspices of UN Habitat and ESCWA)

43. Mr. Frederico Neto, Director of the ESCWA Social Development Division, facilitated the eighth special session, in which participated Ms. Soha Farouk, Programme Officer at UN Habitat; Ms. Mona Harb, Professor of Urban Studies and Politics at the American University of Beirut; Mr. Mohamed Saadieh, President of the Union of Dannieh Municipalities and Co-President of the United Cities and Local Governments World

Organization; and Mr. Ahmed Mansour, Legal Researcher at the UN Habitat International Coalition – Housing and Rights Network.

44. Participants discussed the local dimension of SDG implementation, and the role of cities and local authorities in accelerating SDG implementation and in achieving the urban dimension of the 2030 Agenda. They discussed the importance of administrative and financial decentralization, capacity-building for local authorities, accountability, local measures to protect the environment and promote social and economic development, aligning between the SDGs and local plans in accordance with national priorities, and mobilizing local resources to meet increasing demand for services. Discussions covered equitable urban planning in line with the 'leaving no one behind' principle; and the importance of strengthening the participation of local stakeholders in planning and sustainable development processes. Panellists discussed SDG nationalization in the Arab region; environmental evaluation; and the assessment of governance mechanisms and institutional structures in municipalities and local authorities and their ability to implement the 2030 Agenda.

9. *Sustainable energy and the transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies*
(Under the auspices of the League of Arab States and ESCWA)

45. Panellists included Mr. Mahmoud Mohamed Reda Mahmoud Fathallah, Senior Economist at the League of Arab States; Mr. Ahmed Abdel-Aziz Mohamed Badr, Executive Director of the Regional Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency; Mr. Ayman Fouad Ismail, General Manager of the Palestinian Electric Company; Ms. Yosra Albakkar, Regional Program Manager at the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency; Ms. Thirza Maria Bronner, Programme Director of the Energy Transition Facility of the Netherlands Enterprise Agency under the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy; and Mr. Abdessalem Khazen, Director of the Renewable Energy National Agency for Energy Management of Tunisia. Ms. Radia Sedaoui, Chief of the ESCWA Energy Section, facilitated the special session.

46. Participants commented on the key features of sustainable energy systems in Arab countries and their links to SDG7 targets. They also discussed major challenges, gaps and opportunities in addressing interlinkages between SDG7 and other SDGs. They focused on the importance of attracting and mobilizing financial resources to establish sustainable energy systems, and on key priorities in national development plans that could accelerate the transformation towards sustainable energy systems.

D. Closing session

47. The closing session was moderated by Ms. Khawla Matar, who confirmed the commitment of ESCWA to participatory approaches as a basis for the Arab Forum's success. The first draft would be sent to all participants for comments. The final draft of the 2018 Arab Forum's report would then be presented to the High-level Political Forum in July 2018.

48. Mr. Mohamed Ali Alhakim made a closing statement in which he thanked participants for their engagement in the Forum. He confirmed the commitment of ESCWA to standing by Arab countries, and to conveying the region's achievements and challenges at global forums. He also affirmed ESCWA support for Arab countries that would be submitting their voluntary national reviews that year and in following years.

III. PARTICIPANTS

49. The 2018 Arab Forum was attended by 300 participants from 19 Arab countries, including representatives of the organizing bodies (ESCWA, the League of Arab States, United Nations organizations operating in the Arab region including members of the Regional Coordination Mechanism), Governments, major groups and regional bodies involved in sustainable development.

50. The United Nations was represented by UNRISD, ILO, UNDP, UN Women, FAO, UNEP, UN Habitat, UNFPA, WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNHCR, OHCHR and WFP.

51. Participants included over 70 officials from 18 Arab countries, 16 of which are ESCWA member States, namely, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen; in addition to Algeria and Djibouti. They included high-level representatives from various specialized ministries; national statistical offices; national population councils; and economic, social and environmental councils. Parliamentarians from Iraq, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, the State of Palestine and Tunisia also participated.

52. Major groups and regional and international organizations and funds were represented by the Arab NGOs Network for Development, the Arab Forum for Environment and Development, the Arab Regional Network for Environment and Development, the Arab Network for Food Sovereignty, the Arab Group for the Protection of Nature, Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research, the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization, the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, the Middle East Desalination Research Centre, the Council of Arab Economic Unity, the Regional Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency, the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association, Transparency International, the Saudi Fund for Development, the Islamic Development Bank, and the World Association of Persons with Disabilities. Participants also included representatives of Arab and international academic institutions and of Lebanese, Arab and international media outlets.

Annex

OUTCOME DOCUMENT OF PREPARATORY MEETINGS FOR THE 2018 ARAB FORUM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Arab High-level Forum on the World Summit on the Information Society and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Available at https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/beirut-consensus-ahlf2017-en.pdf.

Regional Seminar for Parliamentarians on the 2030 Agenda. Available at https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/seminar-parliaments-agenda-2030-final-report-en.pdf.

Arab Preparatory Meeting on Energy-related Issued for the 2018 AFSD and the HLPF. Available at https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/outcome_document_on_energy_issues_for_2018_afsd-hlpf_english.pdf.

Arab Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues for the 2018 AFSD and the HLPF. Available at https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/outcome_document-afsd-_prep_meeting2017-en.pdf.

Arab Preparatory Meeting on Environmental and Natural Resources Issues for the 2018 AFSD and the HLPF. Available at https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/outcome_document-final_en.pdf.

Regional Meeting of Civil Society on Sustainable Development in the Arab Region. Available at https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/meeting-arab-civil-society-sustainable-development-key-messages-ar_2.pdf (in Arabic).